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SHIRLEY

RIGHT HAND CULTURE

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FOREWORD

It is well that the young aspirant to musical honors does not always realize the sum total of work which a life-time of effort may proportion. Yet, looking back over a period of twenty years of study, a musician might easily be at a loss to suggest even a small additional contribution to the over-abundance of study literature already extant.

I ask the matured violinist to recall how, in private, day in, day out, for hours at a time, his bow has glided over the strings—how a perfect rendering of even the simplest passage was attained only as a result of arduous struggle.

The first object of this little volume is to shorten these nerve-racking practice-hours, and to allow for a freer development of the student's ability. In addition, it aims to do away with much unnecessary practice on the part of the advanced violinist and 'cellist by means of right hand studies (see p. 6), a few minutes devoted to them daily keeping the right hand fit and ready for its task.

The point at issue is to call attention to the fact that not alone is the right hand entitled to as much consideration as the left; but that it is actually the "playing" hand. The making of music is a means of psychic expression, and the human voice is its ideally perfected

medium. May not this ideal singable perfection be within our grasp instrumentally when the right hand, hitherto only schooled by necessity, is adequately developed in a physical sense?

An acquaintance with every exercise which has been devised for the development of the left hand of the string instrument player is a practical impossibility. It is sufficient to know the best, such as Carl Flesch's "Basic Studies for the Violin." Strange to say, however, there are few exercises for the right hand; indeed the right hand has only a small and partial opportunity for practice; and this in spite of the fact that the fingers of the right hand are as active as those of the left. Yet independence of the fingers of the right hand, suppleness and ability to combine as individual factors in the use of the bow, is imperative. That maximum freedom of motion demanded of the right hand can be obtained only by mastering the necessary practical means of securing it. Hence, to increase the right hand's reserves of muscular strength and elasticity, if not as much time, then, at least as much attention must be devoted to it as to the privileged left hand. This ambidexterity of the hands is essential in many sports, and it is surprising to find hardly any provision made for organic training of the bow hand in the case of the violin player, of whom so sensitive and delicate a use of arm and hand is demanded.

Those who have been privileged to observe some of our great artists in their work-room intimacy, realize that intellect has given its final finish to perfection, that little is left to chance, and that it is not genius, but talent, that insists on the most thorough-going process of clarification.

Beginning with the first lesson, the development of the right hand is left to chance. It often happens that the young violinist who laments his poor tone or awkward wrist only awakens after years to the need of thought and effort toward overcoming his defects. And often, the awakening comes so late that the realization of his wishes is difficult, if not impossible.

The studies which follow do not represent any arbitrary system, but have resulted entirely from the division of a single stroke of the bow according to the individual activity of the various participating muscles of fingers and hand, and its subsequent development. There is no question of far-fetched gymnastics with a mechanical apparatus; the fingers are prepared and developed for their work, on the bow itself, the instrument of the right hand.

The following exercises may be carried out in a few minutes, yet if carefully gone over each day will within a short time develop a light hand and hence a good tone—good results quite out of proportion to the slight investment of effort demanded.

In order to practice the exercises which follow, hold the bow before you as though it were resting in the middle on the open D-string. The thumb should be bent, the fingers close beside one another on the bow, as every elementary scholar is taught, in a perfectly natural position.

I might say at once that not only should the exercises be carried out without strain or stress, but that a correct

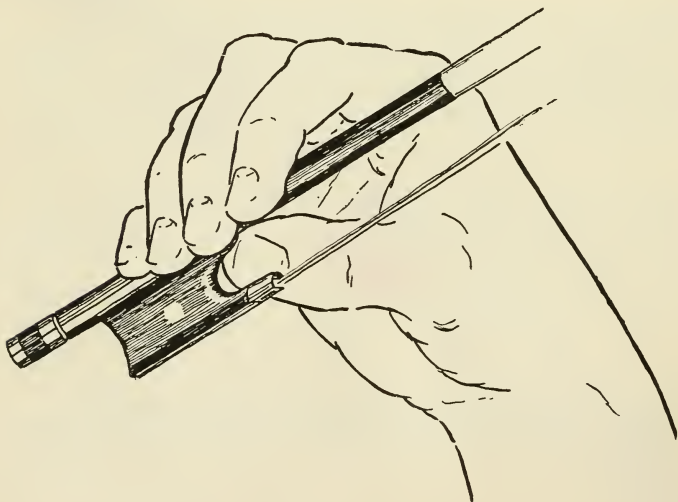
performance of the eleven exercise groups should exhaust the working capacity of the fingers. In this way only can the muscles be strengthened and the period when fatigue makes itself felt be gradually deferred. The movements themselves should gain in breadth and sweep, for only the greater power thus acquired will make the student excel in actual play. Common-sense, naturally, should prevent over-exertion. Hence the number of exercises to be repeated is exactly prescribed, and they should be taken up but once a day, preferably in the morning, before beginning the musical work of the day. The carrying out of this idea demands the greatest possible regularity and devotion.

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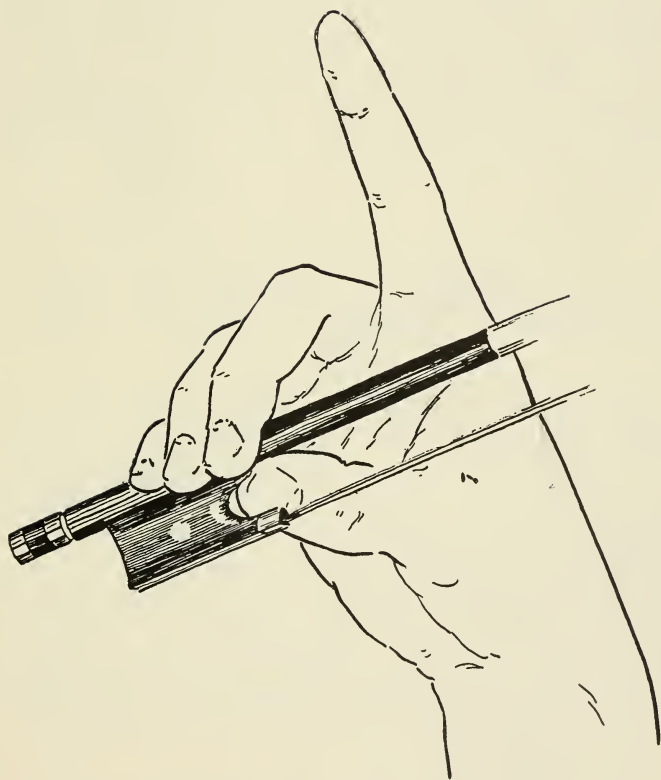
RIGHT HAND CULTURE

EXERCISE I.

With the hand in position as indicated in the foreword, the forefinger is to be lifted lightly from the bow; raise it without straining and let it drop on the bow again. The finger could be raised without any effort at all, yet this would serve no useful purpose. An amount of exertion which would cause the muscles of arm and shoulder to ache is not called for, but a certain energy will be necessary in order to accomplish our aim of strengthening the fingers. The movement described should be repeated, in turn, by the second, third and fourth fingers. Then, beginning again with the forefinger, the whole exercise should be repeated eight times.



Ill. Ia.—General position of the hand.



III. 1b.—Position of the hand with first finger raised.

EXERCISE II.

This exercise is a natural development of its predecessor. It differs from it only inasmuch that, while dropping the first finger, the second is raised at the same time. This movement is distantly akin to a trill on a keyboard instrument, though very slow, as conditioned by the proper finger-control. The combination of the fingers is expressed by the following numbers:

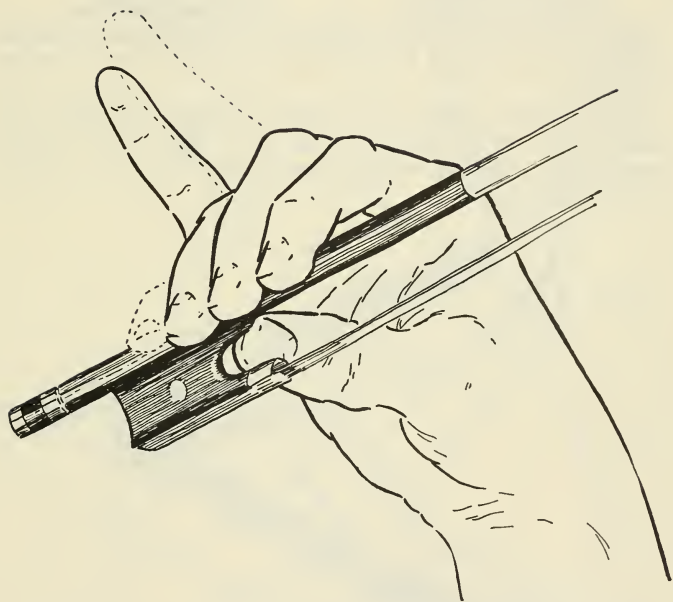
1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2

These numbers indicate which finger (first or second); is to be raised.

Lift the finger from its bent position on the bow, and raise it stretched out, as far as possible away from the bow itself. The remaining fingers rest passively on the bow, uninfluenced by the movement of the practicing fingers—a point to which special attention should be paid. The position of the thumb should not be changed, nor should it be bent inward. A tendency to do so will also be manifest in the fingers nearest those in action, and should be controlled. In the same manner as already shown, the remaining fingers should also be exercised:

3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2
 4 3 4 3 4 3 4 3
 1 4 1 4 1 4 1 4
 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 3
 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4

This exercise should be repeated four times.



III. II.—Position of the hand with interchangeable third and fourth finger.

EXERCISE III.

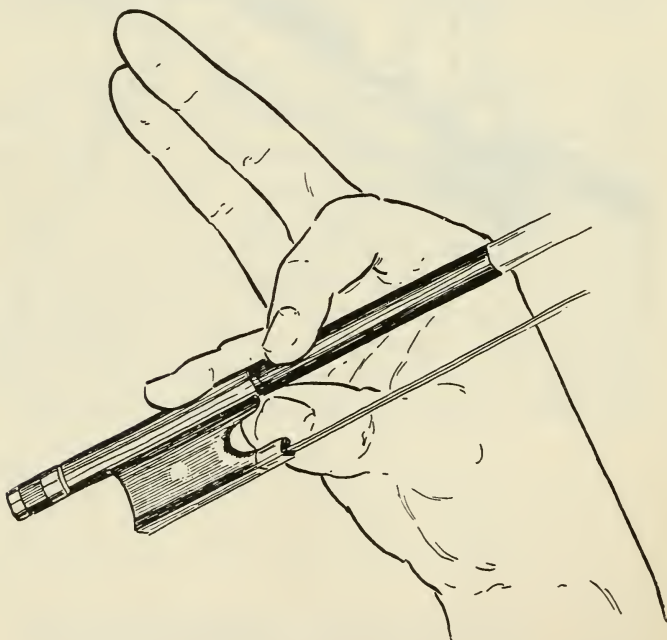
Here the raising and dropping back of the fingers should take place in the same manner, with the difference that *two fingers* are now raised and dropped at the same time. The combination of fingers to be exercised in this way is as follows:

First and fourth finger
Second and third finger
First and second finger

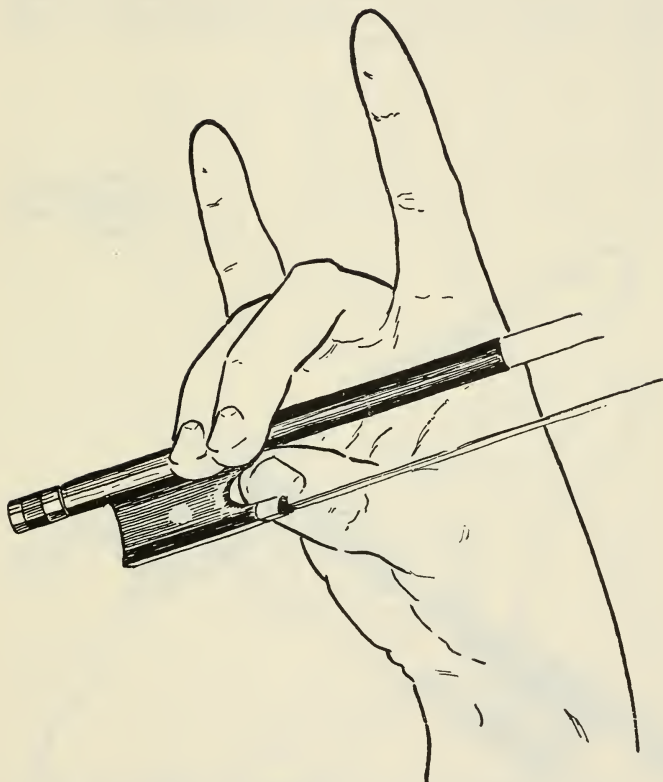
Third and fourth finger
First and third finger
Second and fourth finger

Each of the individual combinations should be practiced four times, followed by four repetitions of the entire exercise.

This exercise may be dropped, should the hand be sufficiently strengthened after two weeks of these gymnastics, since it would mean a small saving of time in the daily study.



III. IIIa.—Position of the hand with second and third fingers raised.



III. IIIb.—Position of the hand with first and fourth fingers raised

EXERCISE IV.

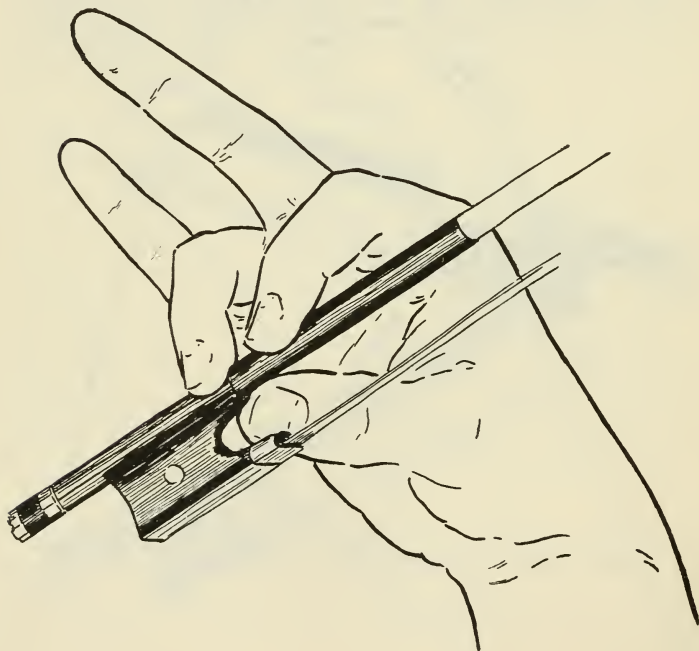
This exercise, like No. II, is an extended version of its predecessor. While the second and third fingers, which were first raised, drop back into place, the first and fourth fingers should be raised simultaneously. The number scheme is as follows:

$$\begin{cases} 2 \dots 1 \dots 2 \dots 1 \dots 2 \dots 1 \dots 2 \dots 1 \\ 3 \dots 4 \dots 3 \dots 4 \dots 3 \dots 4 \dots 3 \dots 4 \end{cases}$$

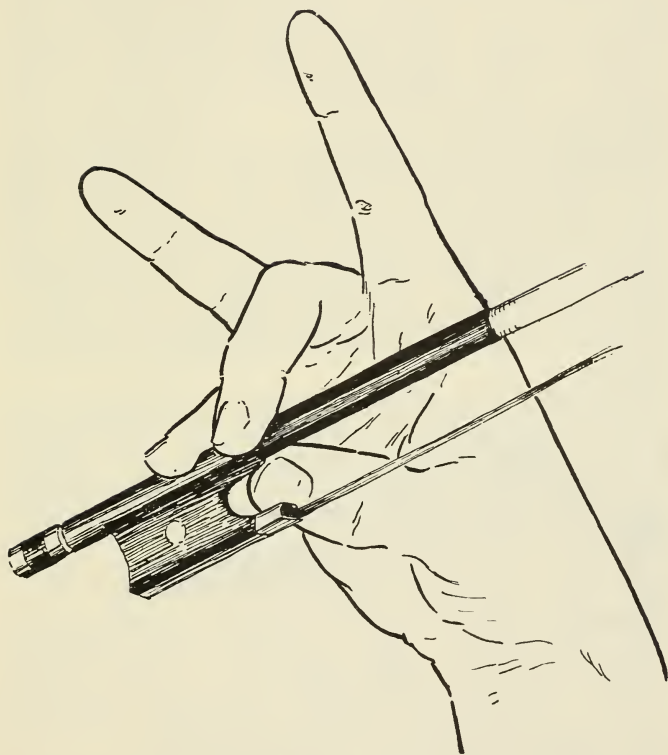
$$\begin{cases} 3 \dots 1 \dots 3 \dots 1 \dots 3 \dots 1 \dots 3 \dots 1 \\ 4 \dots 2 \dots 4 \dots 2 \dots 4 \dots 2 \dots 4 \dots 2 \end{cases}$$

$$\begin{cases} 1 \dots 2 \dots 1 \dots 2 \dots 1 \dots 2 \dots 1 \dots 2 \\ 3 \dots 4 \dots 3 \dots 4 \dots 3 \dots 4 \dots 3 \dots 4 \end{cases}$$

(This exercise
should be re-
peated four
times.)



III. IVa.—Position of the hand with second and fourth fingers raised.



III. IVb.—Position of the hand with first and third fingers raised.

EXERCISE V.

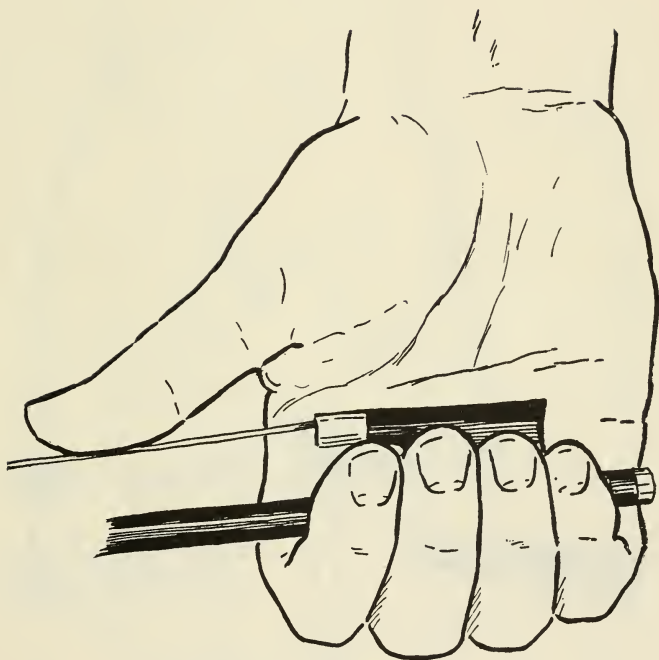
ROLLING MOTION OF THE THUMB.

The right thumb used in conjunction with the other fingers is one of the most important factors in the production of tone. And this, despite the fact that the finger in question is of all the most unschooled. Are the cramped, bent-in, lifeless thumbs we see due to the small and circumscribed nature of the practical work demanded of them? Are they the result of the teacher's final passing over of a fault which many directions and vain reproaches have not been able to correct? The young violinist has so many important aims to realize that lesser ones may easily come to be neglected. Yet these smaller issues often harm the proper development of larger ambitions. The rolling motion of the thumb, serving the purpose of imparting strength and flexibility, is applied in connection with the following three main positions:

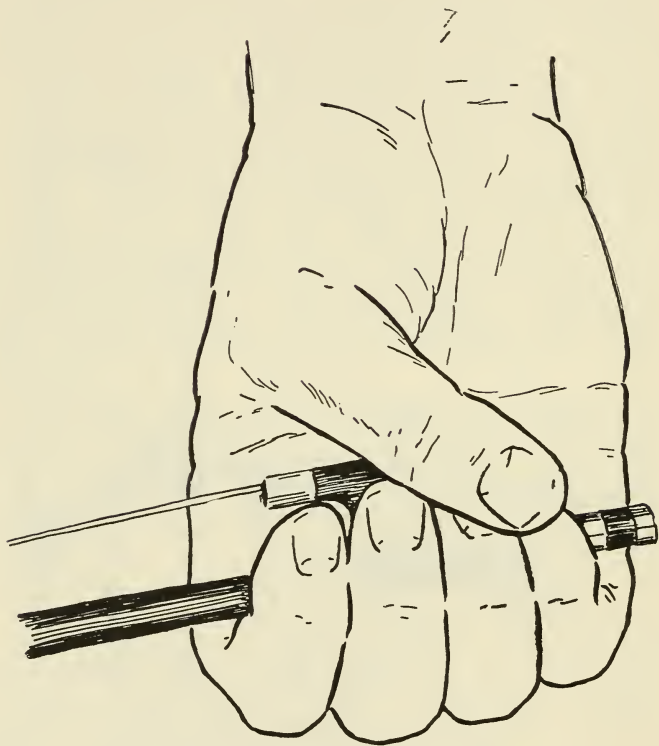
Figure Va. Take the bow at its lowest end between the fingers, turned upward and closing on it, so that it rests on their middle joints. The second and third fingers should rest firmly on the nut, in which position they should remain throughout the exercise. Bow-stick and hair should occupy a horizontal position to the right of the hand, with the thumb stretched out as far as possible over the hair of the bow.

Figure Vb. The out-stretched thumb should now be thrust forward first, while the hollow of the hand approaches the nut, gliding sideways over the closed fingers. During this sidelong movement, the out-stretched hollow of the hand lessens its tension, until the tip of the thumb extends over the little finger.

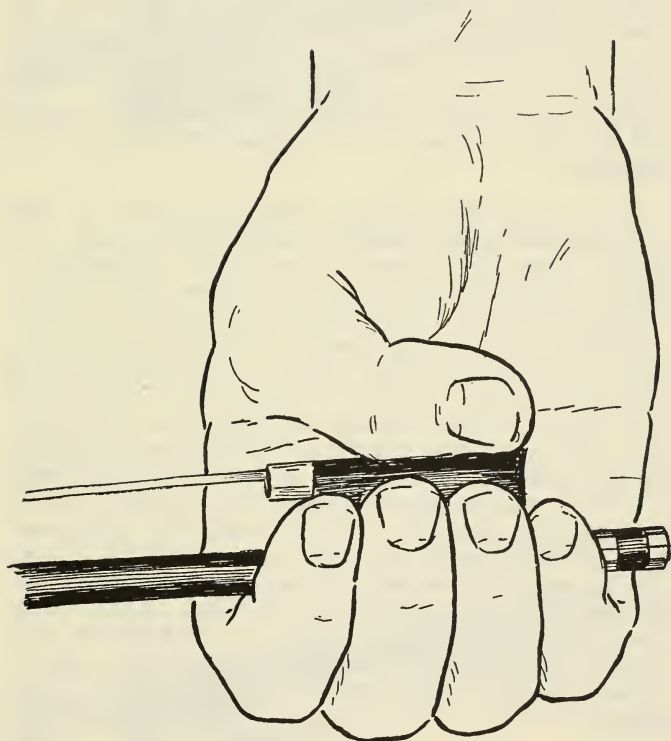
Figure Vc. From this position the thumb should be drawn in until it is closely bent under the fingertips. It should then be drawn, sideways, toward the right, beneath the tips of the fingers, and gradually stretched out until the first position, with which the exercise begins, has been reached. The entire exercise should be repeated sixteen times.



III. Va.—Original position of the thumb.



III. Vb.—The thumb stretched out to the little finger.



III. *Vc.*—The thumb crooked beneath the tips of the finger.

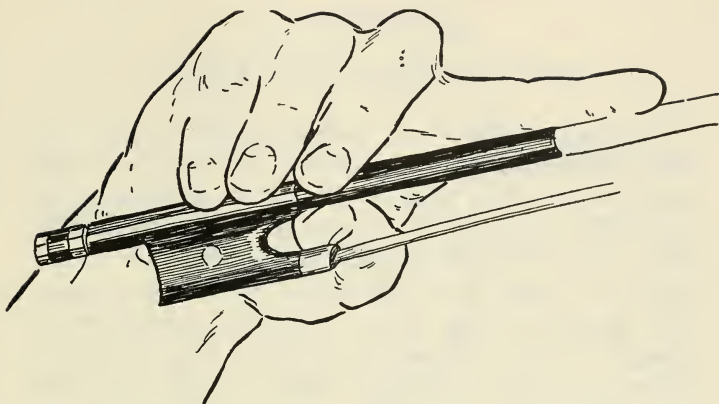
EXERCISE VI.

GLIDING MOTION OF THE FINGERS ON THE BOW-STICK.

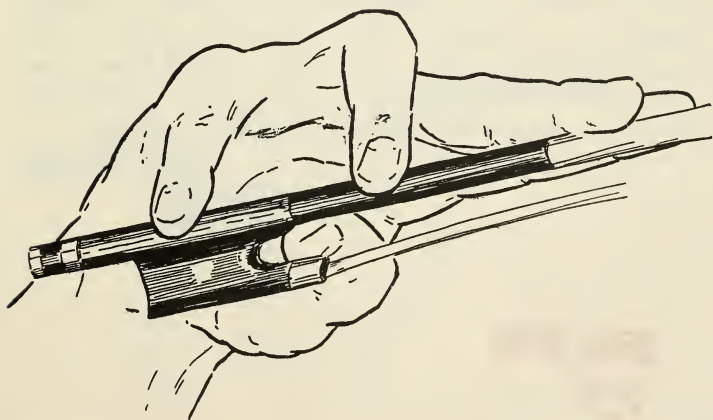
Hold the bow with bent thumb, and fingers closed as though about to play, and as though the middle of the bow were resting on the D-string. This is the starting position. Now let the first finger glide upward along the bow-stick, as far as it will go *without raising it*. The object is to increase the sideward movement of the fingers and to make the most of their existing capacity for extension.

The out-stretched finger should glide back in the manner already described to the starting position, and should repeat the exercise four times; whereupon it should be held in position at the furthest point reached in the movement. The second finger should now be moved from its starting position, along the bow-stick, until it lies beside the first finger. After repeating this gliding movement, up and down, four times, the second finger should take position stretched out beside the first. The third finger should now glide upward from its starting position, stretch out as far as possible and, after four repetitions of the movement, should come to rest somewhat apart from the second finger. This movement on the part of the third finger includes a contracting movement as well. The fourth finger may now glide four times to the side of the third, and be withdrawn as far as the tension of the hand will allow. The fatigue of the hand may best be relieved by allowing it to hang quietly until blood circulation is once more normal.

Four weeks of daily practice are required before the right hand will be able to go through this exercise with a perfectly balanced bow, and the student should patiently await the development and elasticity of the muscles. This result is sure to come and bring its well-earned reward of great ease and lightness of the fingers.



III. VIa.—Position of the hand with outstretched first finger.



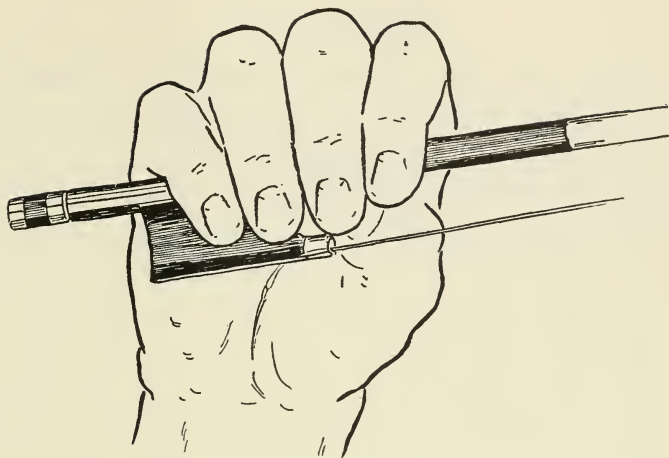
III. VIb.—Position of the hand with little finger thrust out beyond the original position.

EXERCISE VII.

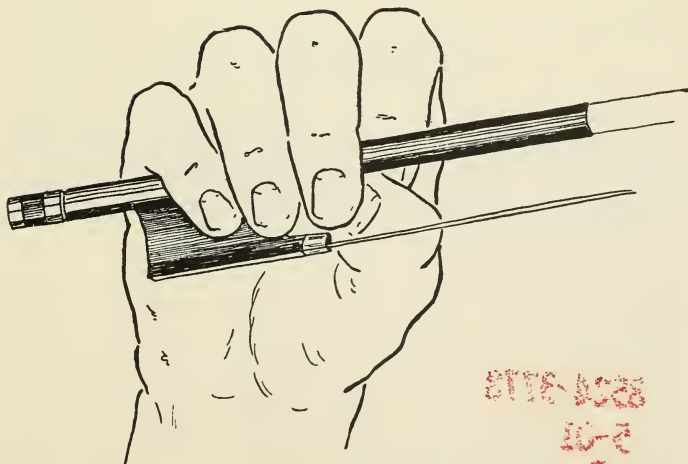
BENDING MOTIONS OF THE FINGERS.

The starting position of the right hand is much the same as in the foregoing exercise. Yet here we must emphasize the fact that the fingertips or, rather, the first joints of the fingers, should lie firmly against the side of the bow-stick, which is turned away from the player, i.e., *thrust out a little beyond their usual position*. This should be done with a considerable exertion of strength. From this position the first finger, held intentionally tense, should be allowed to glide over the curve of the bow; then be drawn upward *upon* the bow and down again on the side turned toward the player. The finger-nail will now be resting on the inner side of the bow, opposite the point where the tip of the finger rested before. The tension of the fingers should be deliberately encouraged, and sentience of touch in the fingertips developed. After a short rest, the finger should reverse the movement described, that is, it should return to its original position by drawing itself up and thrusting itself forward. Each finger should repeat the same movements four times, and the entire exercise should be repeated four times in succession as well.

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III. VIIa.—The starting position.



III. VIIb.—Position of the hand with first finger drawn across the bowstick.

EXERCISE VIII.

This exercise, like Exercises II and IV, is a continuation of its predecessor.

During the time occupied by the forefinger, which has been drawn over the bow-stick, in returning to its starting position, draw another finger—in this case the second finger—across the bow-stick and *vice versa*.

The fingers should alternate in the following manner:

1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2

3 2 3 2 3 2 3 2

3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4

1 4 1 4 1 4 1 4

1 3 1 3 1 3 1 3

2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4

The number indicates the finger to be drawn across the bow-stick. Repeat the entire exercise four times.

EXERCISE IX.

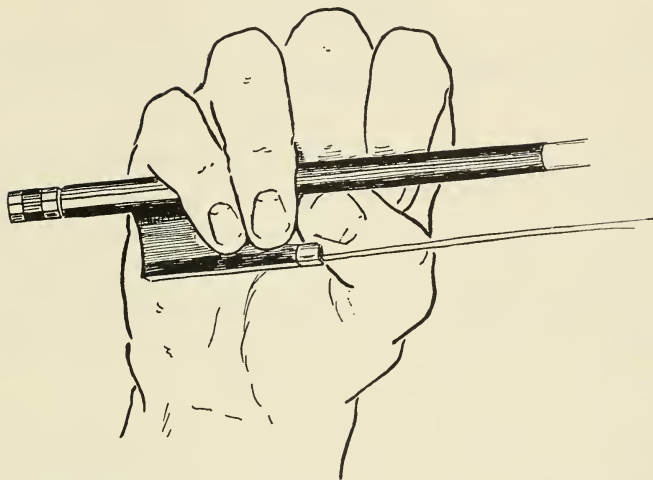
This exercise should be carried out in exactly the same manner as the two preceding exercises, but the combination of fingers should be that of Exercise IV. It should invariably be practiced with two fingers and in the following manner:

{ 2 1 2 1 2 1 2 1
 { 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4

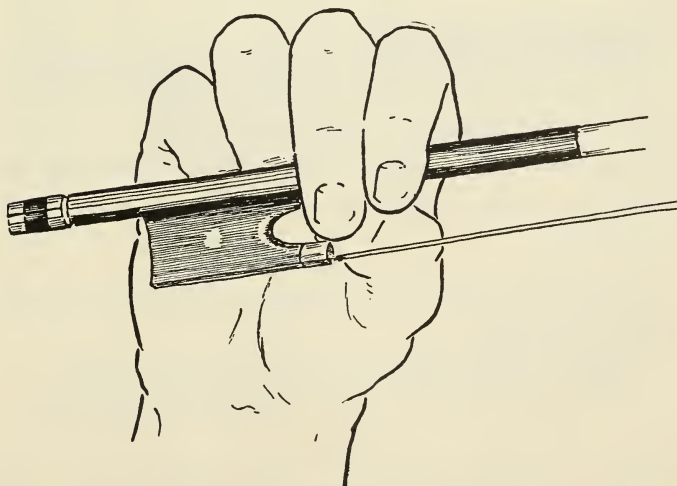
{ 1 2 1 2 1 2 1 2
 { 3 4 3 4 3 4 3 4

{ 1 3 1 3 1 3 1 3
 { 2 4 2 4 2 4 2 4

Practice this four times.



III. IXa.—Position of the hand with first and second fingers drawn across the bowstick.



III. IXb.—Position of the hand with third and fourth fingers drawn across the bowstick.

EXERCISE X.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF STRENGTH IN THE INDIVIDUAL FINGERS.

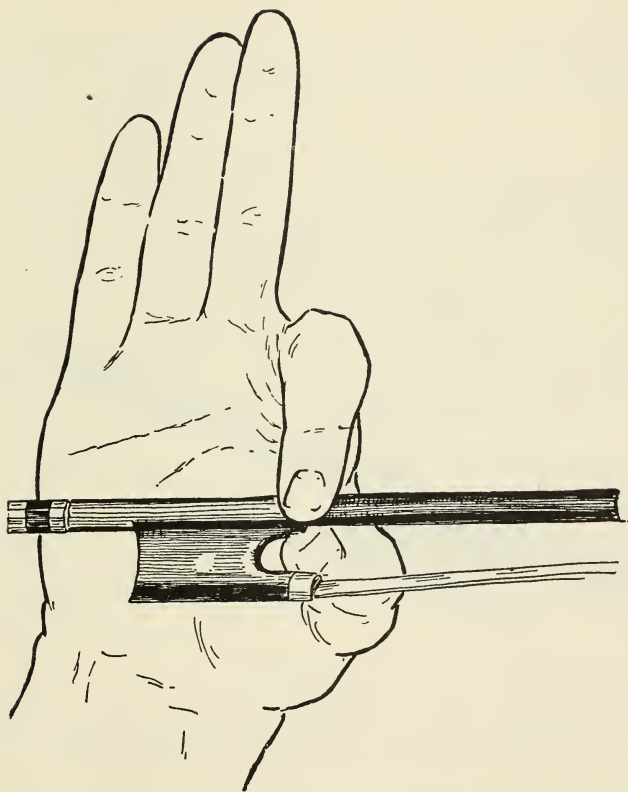
The starting position for the hand is the same as in Exercise I. The bow should be well balanced, and the student should be careful to keep it so throughout the exercise. He should strive to intensify the firm grasp of thumb and forefinger, and raise and drop the remaining fingers (the second, third and fourth), in the same manner as in the first three exercises.

This is most easily done in the case of the second finger, with its firm hold, since it lies opposite the thumb and thus secures the proper balance of the bow. Yet in order to maintain this balance, the first, second and fourth fingers must move either down or up toward the point of contact with the thumb on the opposite side. The two last-named fingers are those handicapped by nature; the third by a hampering muscle, the fourth because it is the weakest finger. Both these fingers, therefore, should receive more patient attention than the others.

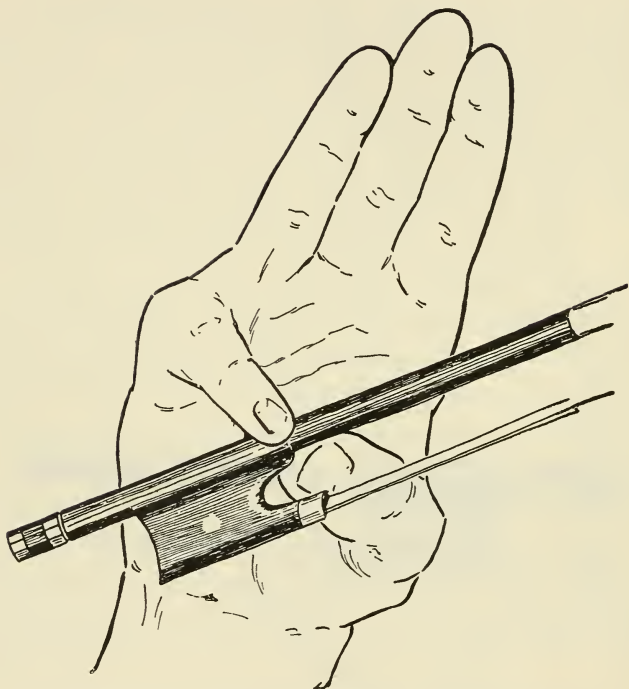
Exercise the remaining fingers by raising them in the following manner:

With the second the 1 - 3 - 4, with the third the
1 - 2 - 4, with the fourth, the
1 - 2 - 3.

This exercise should be repeated four times.



III. Xa.—Position of the hand with first finger holding the bow.



III. Xb.—Position of the hand with fourth finger holding the bow.

EXERCISE XI

TO ACQUIRE A FLEXIBLE WRIST.

The starting position is the usual one. Fingers and thumb should hold the bow lightly, as though a *legato* passage were to be performed, *piano*, with the middle of the bow.

Then, as though about to write on a blackboard with chalk, the student should carry out a series of gentle, curved, yet decided, movements. To develop the simile—he should write his A-B-C's in the air. In this manner the exercise gains definite form and duration. As though actually playing, fingers and thumb follow the movements of the wrist; the arm should be unconstrained—*not stiff*—yet the student should not forget that the exercise is primarily intended for the wrist.

Practice the exercise with the bow thrust upward though playing at the nut. To do this the wrist should be well curved and turned toward the chest. Also practice with flexible downward movement of the arm and with wrist well curved up, as though playing at the point of the bow.

The use of this exercise in the following positions—which prevent premature fatigue of the right arm—is also recommended:

1. With the arm stretched out forward.
2. With the arm stretched out sideways
3. *With the wrist drawn near to the chest.

*The finger exercises for bowing, by Flesch, may be found in the latter's "Basic Studies" (Ur-Studien).

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